

VZCZCXRO4043
PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH
DE RUEHGO #1037/01 2920959
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 190959Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6711
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0616
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4153
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7706
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5265
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3350
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1054
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001037

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: REGIME FOCUS ON "ROADMAP" IGNORES ABUSES

REF: RANGOON 1033

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. On October 18, the regime announced a new constitutional drafting commission amidst reports of ongoing arrests and convictions of pro-democracy activists. Embassy sources reported several family members of prominent monk U Gambira were arrested on October 16 and 17. NLD officials confirmed another five NLD members were sentenced to prison for their alleged roles in the recent protests. The New Light of Myanmar today accused the U.S. of providing training to monks, alongside claims it had released more detainees. The Russian Ambassador downplayed the crackdown, citing instead the need for stability and urging the U.S. to refrain from excessive criticism of the regime. End Summary.

STEP TWO

¶2. (C) On October 18, State-run television announced the regime formed a constitutional drafting committee as part of its so-called "roadmap to democracy." According to the announcement, Chief Justice U Aung Toe will chair the 54-person committee, which includes the hardline Ministers of Information and Minister for Cultural Affairs, and other hand-picked, pro-regime scholars, lawyers, and military officials. The regime did not say when the group will begin its work or how long they expect the process to take. Commenting on the announcement, NLD spokesman Nyan Win said he believes dialogue is necessary before the regime's roadmap can be successful. He noted the government has not yet contacted the NLD or, to his knowledge, Aung San Suu Kyi to follow up on its offer of dialogue. Other opposition leaders have commented that they have no faith in the roadmap and think the commission will simply be a rubber stamp for a constitution many believe has already been drafted.

CONTINUING ARRESTS

¶3. (C) Embassy sources told us authorities arrested several family members of prominent monk U Gambira, the leader of the Monks Alliance, one of the groups that called for last month's demonstrations. Witnesses reported security forces arrested U Gambira's mother and two brothers from their home the night of October 16. The next day, authorities

reportedly arrested his brother, Ko Aung Kyaw Kyaw, while he was tending to HIV patients in a Rangoon clinic. U Gambira remains in hiding, as does his father, sister, and sister-in-law. Authorities have not acknowledged their arrests or released any information on their whereabouts or condition.

¶4. (C) NLD spokesman Nyan Win confirmed five NLD members, including a 75-year-old man, were sentenced to lengthy prison terms in Rakhine State for their alleged roles in the pro-democracy protests of last month. According to NLD sources in Rakhine State, authorities sentenced local NLD chairmen Kyaw Khine and 75-year-old Sein Kyaw to seven and a half years in prison each. NLD members Tun Kyi and Than Pe were each sentenced to seven years. Min Aung, the joint secretary of the local NLD office, reportedly received nine

SIPDIS

and a half years. The NLD said all five men were sentenced in closed trials and noted that authorities have not acknowledged their arrests or publicized the nature of the charges against them. NLD officials could not confirm media accounts that a monk named U Indriya had also been sentenced to seven and a half years, but noted that credible reports of monks being detained and convicted continue.

¶5. (C) An editorial in the regime's mouthpiece daily New Light of Myanmar accused the Embassy of "providing training courses to young monks and novices" and claimed the U.S. instigated the 1988 pro-democracy demonstrations. The paper continues to publish its own figures of the number of persons detained and released to date. Today's edition claimed the regime has now released 2,550 with only 377 still detained. An Australian Embassy contact told us his sources reported at least 400 more people have been arrested since last week, a

RANGOON 00001037 002 OF 002

figure not reflected in the New Light's totals.

RUSSIAN VIEWS

¶6. (C) Charge invited the Russian Ambassador for lunch to discuss the possibilities of U.S-Russian cooperation to advance change in Burma. He began by asserting that change would be dangerous and bring about the economic collapse of the country, but agreed that Russia would be willing to support a gradual transition. Stability, he insisted, is most important. He downplayed the recent harsh crackdown in Burma by claiming that more people died due to Blackwater's actions in Iraq. He cited today's announcement of the Constitution drafting committee as progress, which the U.S. should praise rather than only criticizing. He also noted that Gambari would be permitted to meet with opposition figures during his next visit. After first claiming that Burma presented no regional issues, he later acknowledged that every country now has an impact on others. He was very critical of U.S. sanctions and urged us to increase our trade and investment to promote change in Burma. However, asked about Russia's efforts to increase trade and investment, he said that was his highest priority, but he could not attract any Russian interest.

¶7. (C) The Ambassador proved forthcoming about Russia's cooperation on nuclear issues with Burma: expressing strong support for nonproliferation principles; stressing that Russia only supported peaceful uses of nuclear power; saying 2000 Burmese were now studying a variety of topics in Russia, not just nuclear related subjects; and adding that those studying nuclear physics only studied theory and were not let anywhere near the real thing. After criticizing the U.S. for failure to engage with Burma, he admitted that he was not urging Russian military officers to return Maung Aye's visit to Russia last year.

¶8. (C) Comment: The regime's announcement of its next step on its so-called roadmap to democracy shows Than Shwe's

determination to move forward in defiance of Burmese and international calls for dialogue. He has no intention of opening up the process to gain popular support, and instead has selected a group he feels confident will ensure continued military rule. While Russia will not be as cooperative as China in pushing for reform in Burma, we do not expect they will become the defenders of the Burmese regime either. End Comment.

VILLAROSA